

SFA Update

ISSUE 2

The Key to Workgroup Discussion Success: The SFA Facilitator

NOAA's SFA process has been recognized as one of the promising government practices in managing diversity. One of the key contributors to the success of the SFA was the usage of Facilitators.

The role and objective of the facilitator makes the SFA more than just a survey -- but a survey designed to promote change from bottom up and top down. The facilitator works to ensure inclusion and encourage empowerment. The facilitator also probes to identify internal biases that could affect the outcome of group process.

Through discussion and taking of notes, the facilitator ensures that all voices are equally heard - with no more weight given to a management view or a view of a dominant group member. The facilitator keeps the workgroup on track to identify concerns that they have

control over and assists the workgroup in working toward solutions they have the power to implement. The facilitator also works with groups on elevated issues in determining what is the issue and who can address and act upon it. The facilitator ensures that all ideas are valued -- and different ideas are heard and vetted.

The facilitator is truly a "neutral", since they do not reside in the organizational reporting chain. This objectivity and credibility is invaluable. The facilitator also champions the use and maximization throughout the process of integrating benefits of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and finding different ways of solving problems through viewing the world via other diversity dimensions such as education, occupation, race, gender, etc...



"A Facilitator's Objectivity and Neutrality Are Critical to Successful Discussion"

As you can see, the facilitator plays a critical role in the SFA Workgroup process—

To request a facilitator, just go to the SFA website at

<http://www.rdc.noaa.gov/~Diversity/SFA2002.htm>

WHAT'S HAPPENING:

- *SFA 2002 will be a fully automated Survey—completely online!*
- *Line and Staff Office SFA Coordinators play a critical role in the SFA Administration—do you know who your SFA Coordinator is? See page 2 for details.*
- *For those employees who were not here for the first SFA, check out our archives and get some "background info" on the origins of SFA—<http://www.rdc.noaa.gov/~Diversity/newsfa.html>.*

Improvements From Initial SFA Conducted in '98—More Success Stories

In our last issue, we shared with you success stories directly attributed to the first SFA conducted in 1998. An excellent tool in marketing employee surveys is letting people know that their participation in the survey resulted in action being taken to improve the workplace. Here again are what Line and Staff

Offices have reported as improvement made from SFA '98— "An early success story in the process was in the Admin/Support Workgroup. A critical situation was brought out that impacted all the Admin/Support Staff as well as the other two workgroups. This resulted in addressing the problem in the

session and working together to find a solution." Another: "The SFA 98 survey was a good starting point to learn more about OAR and how it interacts with workplace culture NOAA-wide. It was suggested that as a follow on and as a compliment to the SFA, OAR would hold employee focus group sessions to let the

More Success Stories (cont.)

employees bring up issues and concerns that were of importance to them in their workplace. The SFA was responsible for initiating this process.”

More: “The most important issue in Alaska Region was the lack of communication at all levels. The following actions have been implemented. The Regional Administrator conducts Regional Board Meetings to keep AKR, AFSC, ABL, General Counsel, and Enforcement management informed on current and developing topics. All Hands Meetings are held to inform Regional management and employees of issues the Regional Administrator are involved with. The divisions hold regular staff meetings where employees can express their concerns on issues before decisions are made and they are aware of the projects other employees are working

on. On time and attendance issues: “Regarding time and attendance, the office had a facilitated session involving managers and a subset of the staff that was most unhappy with the situation that pertained to them. The facilitated session enabled the participants frankly air their feelings. This provided a great opportunity to experience “where the other guy was coming from.” It also was the beginning of a series of individual dialogs between staff and management that continue to today.” Another: “Established a “recreation” committee to organize social events and create a better sense of community within the organization” and

“Establishing a review board of management and employee representatives to review performance problems and reports and make remedial recommendations.” This same office also reported: “Modified performance plans to require supervisors to take one supervisory/leadership course per year.” In upcoming issues, we will continue to provide SFA success stories—stay tuned.



Success Stories Validate SFA's Effectiveness—Your Voice Counts!

What Is My Workgroup??? What About My TeamLeader??

When you take the SFA Survey, you will see a constant reference to “my workgroup.”

Let’s try to clear this up—in short, your workgroup consists of your supervisor and all of those people who report to that supervisor. Team—leaders are not supervisors, in that they do not have the legal authority to execute supervisory responsibilities which entail changing working conditions, which is what happens when workgroups develop action plans as a result of SFA Workgroup meetings. While we recognize that team-leaders across NOAA conduct critical management-like

functions such as work distribution, guidance on assignments and direction on general office happenings, they are not ultimately accountable for your workgroup’s particular mission and responsibility—your supervisor is!

While TeamLeaders are critical in Accomplishing Office Goals, Only Your Supervisor Has the Authority to Actually Change Working Conditions

Each Line and Staff Office has varying degrees of what duties a team-leader actually executes. For those offices where the team-leader is viewed more as a super-

visor, employees will have to adjust their mindset and focus on the actual workgroup supervisor as discussed earlier in this column. Keep in mind that this “mind-shift” will not preclude you or your co-workers from discussing team-leader issues. The Workgroup Feedback Meetings will allow you to have a perfect forum for discussing the SFA results, including any issues pertaining to the team-leader dynamic in the your workgroup.

NOAA’s SFA Coordinators—Keys to Success

While many people contribute to the overall success of the SFA Process, the SFA Coordinators deserve a special column for the work they perform as a part of their regularly assigned duties. Each Coordinator is responsible for carrying out the fundamentals of the SFA, such as ensuring that each Line and Staff Office is accurately depicted so that appropriate workgroup reports can be generated; soliciting “local questions” from their particular office to be incorporated into the Survey; reporting “success stories” from their office so we can champion SFA effectiveness; and, probably the most important, communicating to all levels of their Line/Staff Offices the critical information pertain-

ing to all aspects of SFA. Many of the SFA Coordinators are “seasoned veterans”, people who were here for the 1998 effort—their experience helps immensely with our latest effort.

Here’s a list of NOAA’s SFA Headquarters Coordinators (Local Coordinators also are designated, and play an equally critical role in helping SFA be a success):

NWS—Dr. Stephan Smith
NOS—Ruth Moore
NESDIS—Ida Hakkarinen
NMFS—Natalie Huff

OAR—Ann Georgilas, Rich Lataitis

OMAO—Jim Martin

OFA—Ann Murphy, Victoria Kruk

UNSEC—Leila Afzal

